

CLAIMS:

1. A method for processing poultry, the method comprising:
loading individual poultry into each poultry carrier of a plurality of poultry
5 carriers to provide a plurality of loaded poultry carriers, wherein each loaded poultry
carrier is capable of restraining only one individual poultry at a time;
determining a processing sequence in a processing system comprising a
plurality of processing stations for each loaded poultry carrier, wherein determining
the processing sequence comprises selecting two or more of the processing stations at
10 which the poultry will undergo processing;
processing the individual poultry in each of the loaded poultry carriers in the
two or more selected processing stations of the processing sequence; and
transporting each loaded poultry carrier between the two or more processing
stations using an automated conveying system connecting the plurality of processing
15 stations;
wherein each poultry carrier comprises an identification tag associated
therewith;
and wherein the processing sequences for two or more of the loaded poultry
carriers are different.
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2. A method according to claim 1, wherein the plurality of processing stations
comprises at least one data collection station at which poultry data is collected and at
least one functional station at which poultry is changed, and further wherein selecting
two or more of the processing stations at which the individual poultry will undergo
25 processing comprises selecting at least one data collection station and at least one
functional station.
3. A method according to claim 1, further comprising assigning the
identification tag to each poultry carrier.

4. A method according to claim 1, further comprising assigning the identification tag to the poultry carrier after loading the poultry carrier, wherein at least a portion of the identification tag is based on a characteristic of the individual poultry in the loaded poultry carrier.

5. A method according to claim 1, wherein determining the processing sequence for the individual poultry in each loaded poultry carrier comprises selecting the two or more processing stations at which the individual poultry will undergo processing before processing the individual poultry at any of the selected processing stations of the processing sequence.

6. A method according to claim 1, wherein determining the processing sequence for the individual poultry in each loaded poultry carriers comprises selecting at least one of the two or more processing stations at which the individual poultry will undergo processing after processing the individual poultry in at least one of the two or more processing stations of the processing sequence.

7. A method according to claim 1, wherein the transporting comprises transporting each loaded poultry carrier only to the selected two or more processing stations of the processing sequence for the loaded poultry carrier.

8. A method according to claim 1, wherein the transporting comprises transporting each loaded poultry carrier through all of the processing stations of the plurality of processing stations, and further wherein each loaded poultry carrier is processed only at the selected two or more processing stations of the processing sequence for that loaded poultry carrier.

9. A method according to claim 1, further comprising identifying a characteristic of each individual poultry in the loaded poultry carriers, wherein determining the processing sequence is at least partially based on the identified characteristic of the individual poultry in the loaded poultry carrier.

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10. A method according to claim 9, wherein the identified characteristic comprises species or breed of the poultry.

11. A method according to claim 9, wherein the identified characteristic
10 comprises weight of the poultry.

12. A method according to claim 9, wherein the identified characteristic comprises gender of the poultry.

13. A method according to claim 1, further comprising storing information
15 related to each individual poultry in each of the loaded poultry carriers in a database.

14. A method according to claim 13, wherein the information comprises the identification tag.

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15. A method according to claim 13, wherein the information comprises an image of the individual poultry in each of the loaded poultry carriers.

16. A method according to claim 1, wherein a processing station of the plurality
25 of processing stations comprises a cleaning station.

17. A method according to claim 1, wherein a processing station of the plurality of processing stations comprises a weighing station.

18. A method according to claim 1, wherein a processing station of the plurality of processing stations comprises a sexing station.
19. A method according to claim 1, wherein a processing station of the plurality of processing stations comprises a beak treatment station.
20. A method according to claim 1, wherein a processing station of the plurality of processing stations comprises a claw treatment station.
21. A method according to claim 1, wherein a processing station of the plurality of processing stations comprises an imaging station.
22. A method according to claim 1, wherein a processing station of the plurality of processing stations comprises a holding station.
23. A method according to claim 1, wherein the individual poultry comprises a hatchling.
24. A method according to claim 1, wherein the individual poultry comprises an embryo.
25. A method for processing poultry, the method comprising:
loading individual poultry into each poultry carrier of a plurality of poultry carriers to provide a plurality of loaded poultry carriers, wherein each loaded poultry carrier is capable of restraining only one individual poultry at a time;
assigning an identification tag to each poultry carrier;
determining a processing sequence in a processing system comprising a plurality of processing stations for each loaded poultry carrier, wherein determining the processing sequence comprises selecting two or more of the processing stations at

which the individual poultry will undergo processing, wherein the plurality of processing stations comprises at least one data collection station at which poultry data is collected and at least one functional station at which poultry is changed, and further wherein selecting two or more of the processing stations at which the individual poultry will undergo processing comprises selecting at least one data collection station and at least one functional station;

identifying a characteristic of each individual poultry in the loaded poultry carriers, wherein determining the processing sequence is at least partially based on the identified characteristic of the individual poultry in the loaded poultry carrier;

processing the individual poultry in each of the loaded poultry carriers in the two or more selected processing stations of the processing sequence; and

transporting each loaded poultry carrier between the two or more processing stations using an automated conveying system connecting the plurality of processing stations;

wherein the processing sequences for two or more of the loaded poultry carriers are different.

26. A method according to claim 25, wherein the individual poultry comprises a hatchling.

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27. A method according to claim 25, wherein the individual poultry comprises an embryo.

28. An automated poultry processing system comprising:

a plurality of processing stations comprising at least one data collection station capable of collecting data regarding individual poultry and at least one functional station capable of changing the individual poultry;

an automated conveying system connecting the plurality of processing stations;

a plurality of poultry carriers adapted to travel along the automated conveying system between the plurality of processing stations, wherein each poultry carrier is capable of restraining only one individual poultry at a time;

an identification tag associated with each poultry carrier of the plurality of poultry carriers; and

a control system operatively connected to the automated conveying system and the plurality of processing stations, the control system routing the plurality of poultry carriers along the automated conveying system and activating the plurality of processing stations as needed.

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29. A system according to claim 28, wherein the plurality of processing stations comprises a weighing station, a beak treatment station, and a claw treatment station.

30. A system according to claim 28, wherein control system comprises a central controller controlling the automated conveying system and the plurality of processing stations.

31. A system according to claim 28, wherein the control system comprises a distributed control system comprising two or more computing elements controlling different components of the automated poultry processing system.

32. A system according to claim 28, wherein the automated conveying system connects one or more of the processing stations in a parallel configuration.

33. A system according to claim 28, wherein the automated conveying system connects the one or more of the processing stations in a serial configuration.

34. A system according to claim 28, wherein one or more of the processing stations comprises two or more bays.